

“The Advancing Green Tide”:

Silence and Nature in J.G. Farrell’s *Troubles*

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Introduction: Choosing Sides

At the beginning of J.G. Farrell's *Troubles* (1970), Major Brendan Archer travels to Ireland to "claim" a bride he can barely remember. It is the summer of 1919 and the gunfire of the Great War is still ricocheting in his shell-shocked brain. Home on leave three years earlier he had met Angela Spencer, eldest daughter of one of the last Anglo-Irish Ascendancy families of the Wexford coast. Reading her weekly letters at the front, the Major is overawed by a mass of domestic detail so dense that he is only dimly aware that she has started to refer to herself as his fiancé. To point out that the engagement was non-consensual on his part, the Major reasons, would only be "trivial and discourteous" (12), and besides, Angela's factual tone works like a soothing salve on his badly rattled nerves. So at the end of the war he travels to the Majestic, a dilapidated monstrosity of a hotel owned by the eccentric Spencer family. Here, the Major finds not only imperial splendour gone to seed, but that the formidable "granite" (24) realism of Angela's letters obscures all but the most superficial picture of her life. After a brief and apathetic greeting, she retreats into the dim recesses of the building and is never seen by the Major again. It is only on the morning of her funeral that he discovers his "fiancé" was a victim of leukaemia.

Following the funeral, the Major escapes the discomforts of the Majestic to visit a sick aunt in London. He is soon to find that the "vast and narcotic inertia" (42) of Anglo-Ireland is strangely seductive, and he will return to witness the destruction of the Majestic and of the Spencer family's entire way of life. In the meantime, the trip to London affords a clearer picture of the baffling cycles of terrorism and reprisal that characterise the Irish Civil War. As he reads the London metropolitan newspapers, he reflects on the "dull and dispiriting" conflict:

How could one possibly take an interest, when, for instance, at the same time Negroes and white men were fighting it out on the streets of Chicago? Now *that* gripped the Major's imagination much more forcibly. Unlike the Irish troubles one knew instantly which side everyone was on. (113)

As he reads on he is increasingly distracted by the "brighter, bloodier meat" of Bolshevik revolution and the Amritsar massacre (114). With closer scrutiny, this seemingly unremarkable passage offers an entry point to explore issues of difference, race and representation in the Irish context.

Initially, the passage may signify another "effective if unsubtle" attempt to emphasise the novel's historicity (Bergonzi 61). By interrupting the narrative with newspaper accounts of political unrest in India, Africa and the United States, Farrell evokes a period of cataclysmic changes to the British Empire and places the Irish conflict in a global pattern of nationalist agitation. As the first panel of Farrell's empire triptych, *Troubles* sets the tone for a devastating critique of the cultural and economic aspects of colonialism in *The Siege of Krishnapur* (1973) and *The Singapore Grip* (1978). As Elleke Boehmer has shown, the decolonisation of Ireland provided a source of inspiration for nationalist movements throughout the British Empire (106). If Boehmer's use of the contested term "decolonisation" runs the risk of obscuring the continuation of power relationships between England and its former colonies, her point nevertheless highlights the immense political and psychological significance of Irish independence in the breakdown of the British Empire.

Farrell's vision of declining imperial power extends beyond the newspaper references and into the stylistic and thematic fabric of the text. From the novel's mock-nostalgic opening words – "In those days..." – the Majestic is depicted as the mouldering remains of a lavish imperial past. The Major walks through the hotel

doors on his first day in Ireland and into a world utterly disconnected from the pulse of modern living, symbolised most poignantly by the clock in the hallway set to the wrong time. In the tea party that follows he is permitted one brief and flickering image of his fiancé before she disappears entirely. Stupefied with illness and exhaustion, the guests at the tea party stage a wretched performance of English superiority. The cancer-ridden Boy O'Neill – a name that is itself highly suggestive in the colonial context – pierces the thickening gloom by declaring that the Irish servants are “like children,” and Angela, amid fits of weary coughing, “languidly” relives golden memories of the Raj (22-24). Before the Major's senses are entirely deadened by his fellow guests' “overpoweringly sedative” remarks, he can vaguely discern the disconcerting ironies of the situation – that they are sick and dying as they “nervously [discuss] the abomination of Sinn Féin” (23). Through this soporific fog of boredom and fatigue, Farrell's view of a moribund British Empire begins to take shape.

Whilst Farrell's use of newspaper extracts invests his portrayal of a degenerating Anglo-Irish Ascendancy with global significance, it also displays an ostensibly “realist” approach to history. The newspaper reference to the Chicago race riots seems to support Bernard Bergonzi's view of Farrell as a “conscious realist” (61), a designation that, despite Bergonzi's intentions, carries negative connotations in the postmodern literary landscape. Contrary to critics who reject Farrell's work as a relic of liberal humanist ideology, Ralph Crane and Jennifer Livett argue that Farrell uses contemporary documentation to interrogate the relationship between “history-as-text and history-as-experience” (72). Following from Crane and Livett, the reference to the Chicago riots can be read as part of Farrell's larger project of exposing the tensions between competing historical discourses. But if this particular extract is suggestive of Farrell's postmodernist sensibilities, it is far more suggestive in the

context of another theoretical “post” from which Ireland has traditionally been marginalised.

Paradoxically a colony within the imperial centre, Ireland has been overlooked by critics on the hunt for “brighter, bloodier” postcolonial meat. In this context the Major’s confusion over “sides” gestures to troublesome issues of Ireland’s proximity to empire and complicity with its projects, a confusion that seems to resonate in many of the founding texts of postcolonial orthodoxy. The authors of the seminal study *The Empire Writes Back* (1989), for instance, pause only briefly to consider Ireland’s postcolonial credentials, cautiously conceding that the nation’s complicity in imperialism “makes it difficult” to grant it postcolonial status (33). In a considerably more aggressive contribution to the debate, Liam Kennedy vehemently denies that a “junior partner” in the imperial enterprise can viably be compared with the appropriately poverty-stricken “real third world” (665-69), an accusation that may seem just in light of Ireland’s share in the economic and political spoils of empire. However, as the postcolonial debate has developed, so too has the willingness of many critics to bend and flex the paradigms established in texts such as *The Empire Writes Back*. A new space has emerged at the intersection of postcolonial and Irish studies for exploring Ireland’s relationship with empire, and for challenging what Luke Gibbons terms “the colonization of theory” (27). Joe Cleary has responded to this challenge by arguing that Ireland was integrated into the geopolitical and capital realm of Western Europe in radically unequal ways (106). Cleary’s work, and that of many others in the field, resists the notion of colonisation as a universal experience that transcends historical and geographic difference.

If the Major’s concern with “sides” is suggestive of Ireland’s position as England’s “junior partner,” it also hints at a much deeper anxiety. In the Chicago race

riots, it is the symbolic opposition of “white men” and “Negroes” that “[grips] the Major’s imagination” – an opposition that is distressingly absent in the Irish conflict. Simultaneously “white” and “native,” the Irish generate a paradox for colonial and postcolonial discourse alike. Abdul JanMohammed’s essay on the Manichean allegory, another foundational postcolonial text, is again unable to accommodate Ireland: “black” and “white” cannot function as a medium of exchange between “good and evil, superiority and inferiority, civilisation and savagery” if the crucial visual signifier is absent (1059). Unlike the “Negroes” of Chicago, the Irish do not wear their skins “like uniforms” of difference (113).

However, the absence of racial difference in the Irish context reveals that “Negro” is itself a slippery signifier. As Anne McClintock has shown, the emergence of social Darwinism in the nineteenth century provided the ideological tools to construct the Irish as a race of “white negroes,” closer to Africans and other supposedly degenerate races than to their European neighbours (*Imperial Leather* 52). McClintock compellingly demonstrates that cultural and economic difference stands in as surrogate skin colour, marking the Irish as a race of innately inferior “celtic calibans,” or, to use David Cairns and Shaun Richards’ term, of “covert blacks” (48). Such notions, according to Cairns and Richards, operate in tandem with pseudo-scientific observations of the Irish physique and facial features (48). So if the Irish do not wear their skins like uniforms, they are nevertheless dressed in more complex and ambivalent ideological garb. It is this ambivalence that underlies the Major’s confusion over “sides” in the Irish context, and that Farrell consciously exploits in other key scenes in the text. In one such scene, the Major observes a group of “old cronies” picking through garbage bins in search of something edible. The Major twice observes that the Irish women are “swathed in black” (278), and it is this colour that

seems to dominate his anxious recollection of the event later in the text – surrounded by the opulent excesses of the ball at the Majestic, he finds an image of “old women, black as ravens” lurking in his head (338). That the women are “black as ravens” suggests that blackness is as much about class and gender as about “race” itself.

Again, the newspaper reference to the Chicago riots offers an enticing taste of the text’s larger concerns – throughout *Troubles*, the “white negroes” are a source of profound anxiety for Farrell’s Anglo-Irish. Indeed, “Anglo-Irish” is itself an unstable category, one that comes perilously close to merging with its dark and savage counterpart. Farrell signals his intention to confound such static categories in the geographic position of the Majestic: like the family it contains, the hotel is built into Irish soil, yet faces out to sea towards the English homeland. This sense of the Spencers’ ambivalent status is strengthened by a series of disconcerting interchanges between “Anglo-Irish” and “Irish” in the text. The Major’s early confusion about whether to place his fiancé in the latter category (15) deepens into a more alarming awareness that the Irish terrorists “look like anyone at all” (101) – by which he means, of course, the universal “anyone” of the English male. This worrisome overlap between the savage Irish and their civilised rulers is enacted in Ripon’s story about a vicious attack on some “suspicious individuals” who are “no doubt Sinn Feiners” (30), but who turn out to be nothing more than innocent workmen. Directly following this, the Major reflects that Ripon’s laziness is “incredibly...Irish” – yet it is Sarah, the only native Irish present, who corrects Ripon’s behaviour (39).

Immediately prior to this scene Sarah makes explicit the necessity of “[choosing] your tribe” (34), a maxim that finds a less ironic counterpart in Edward’s concrete conviction that “there are only two sides in Ireland” (56). At this point in the text the Major finds such bigotry entirely superfluous, but as his stay in Ireland

progresses, so too does his awareness of the inevitability of choosing sides and tribes. Whilst he is sympathetic with the Irish cause, he initially believes that the “unruly” behaviour of the Irish people renders the concept of their independence “absurd,” and agrees with Edward that the English “undoubtedly knew more about running the country” than its native inhabitants (57). These comments mobilise some of the central tenets that justify the dispossession of Irish land. Both he and Edward construct the Irish as incompetent children, who could pass down the road of cultural and social maturity if they would only submit to the guiding hand of British paternalism. According to Declan Kiberd, such ideologies stem from the coloniser’s unease with “the child that lurked within himself” (30). From this point it logically follows that as children, the Irish are incapable of self-governance and should submit to the “moral authority” (57) of their English fathers.

As these examples indicate, the Major is not an “outsider” with “no axe to grind,” as John Spurling somewhat naively suggests (167). However, his seemingly stable commitment to empire starts to splinter under the pressure of a growing empathy with the Irish people, and he comes to doubt the veracity of Edward’s impassioned declaration that “ninety-nine” per cent of them do not want Home Rule (73). Furthermore, the Sinn Féin’s “unruly behaviour” is mirrored and at times exceeded by that of the Black and Tans, prompting the Major to comment that the “cure” for the Irish troubles “may be as bad as the disease” (173). It is a statement that suggests a growing confusion over with which “side” he should identify, and that subtly resonates with the newspaper reference to the Amritsar massacre that directly follows that of the Chicago race riots. As Lynda Prescott suggests, the massacre foregrounds the fine line between authority and brutality in the colonial context (169),

and, like the violent behaviour of the Black and Tans, utterly undermines the notion of English “moral authority.”

As the Black and Tans’ brutality threatens to erode the boundary between savagery and civilisation, the Major is increasingly aware of the forces that relegate the Irish to the dark side of this equation. He obliquely acknowledges the role of economic disadvantage in producing discourses of Irishness in a discussion with Edward regarding some “tattered” Irish children scavenging for food. According to Joep Leerssen, colonialist discourses have traditionally appropriated Irish poverty as evidence of an inherently bestial nature, and of the belief that the Irish are closer to animals than humans on the Great Chain of Being (26). The Major implicitly questions such notions by wondering aloud if the difference between “one of those little brats” and “the son of a gentleman” is about privilege and education rather than biology. For Edward, and for the ideological processes that delineate savagery and civilisation, an educated Irish child can only ever be “a monkey in a suit of clothes” (187). Here, as throughout the text, the species divide is curiously indistinct – at the Majestic servants are confused with dogs (49) and dogs described as “ladies in a harem” (278). Typical of Farrell’s work is a strange and often hilarious relationship between humans and animals – some of the more memorable moments in *The Singapore Grip*, for instance, involve an orang-utan with a penchant for girls’ bottoms, and a wretched, mangy spaniel called The Human Condition. But Edward’s three pigs are singular in this bizarre menagerie for the love and attention he lavishes upon them, indulging them with a succulent smorgasbord of “iced cakes, barm bracks [and] Swiss rolls” (145) from the famous Dublin bakery after which they are named – Johnston, Mooney and O’Brien (Crane, “After Beckett” 112). Through this comedy, as through that which surrounds The Human Condition and so many other peculiar

pets, Farrell weaves a darker thread. The pigs enjoy a diet and an almost human dignity denied to the nameless mass of Irish peasants for whom Edward, as landlord, claims responsibility. In this world where pigs dine on cake while people scavenge for grain, the label “Paddy Pig” (170) is suggestive of English rather than of Irish brutishness.

Farrell’s propensity to blur the boundaries of the species divide has its most violent manifestation in Edward’s view of the Sinn Feiners as “a species of game” to be hunted in the landscape (416). His obsession with the enemy is finally brought to fruition when he shoots and kills a young man he has lured into the hotel grounds. The Major reacts to this execution with horror, making explicit the doubts and uncertainties that have complicated his identification with the “side” of the English colonisers: “...these are our own people!...This is their country as much as it is ours...*more* than it is ours!” (416). By recognising the Irish as “our own people,” the Major gestures to a central paradox of colonial occupation: as a nation of the British Union, Ireland’s democratic rights can no longer be denied. It is a paradox that adds another layer to the already weighty concept of “sides” in the Irish context.

It is between these dense and subtle layers of meaning that Farrell’s critique of empire emerges. Through the Major’s anxious need to establish “which side everyone [is] on,” Farrell complicates and extends current discourses of Irishness in both colonial and postcolonial thinking. Apparent in each, albeit for radically different reasons, is an uneasiness about the conflation of “white” and “native” in colonial spaces. For Farrell’s Anglo-Irish, at the heart of this uneasiness is a need to subject the celtic calibans to the colonisers’ gaze. By grounding his representation of the Irish in this fear of a racially imperceptible native population, Farrell consciously inhabits the dominant colonialist perspective in order to systematically undermine it. His

intention is not to replace colonialist stereotypes with a new and “accurate” set of representations, but to deliberately construct the Irish as a silent and menacing textual absence. It is an approach that opens a theoretical space to reconsider the trope of native silence in colonialist discourse and in postcolonial resistance.

Silence as Menace

Like his approach to history, Farrell’s attitude to his native characters has proven problematic for some critics to pinpoint. Responses to *The Siege of Krishnapur* have been particularly ambivalent in this regard, with some critics fearing that the attacking Indian sepoys function as little more than comic “cannon fodder” (Drabble 190). In a somewhat extreme example of this critical scepticism, D.C.R.A. Goonetilleke accuses Farrell of having “pride in the English,” and more astonishingly, of being a “crypto-racialist” (422). Goonetilleke’s largely unsubstantiated claims are so absurd as to deflect serious scrutiny, but they nevertheless echo the uncertainty of some more rigorous interpretations of Farrell’s work. In an essay on the life and death of “the finest novelist of recent times,” Derek Mahon’s insistence that “Jim was no racist” borders on the defensive (vii). Farrell displays sympathy for his Chinese and Indian characters, writes Mahon, which is “curiously” absent in *Troubles*, where the Irish remain “oddly baffling to the narrator, as to his protagonist” (viii).

Mahon’s hesitant approach is indicative of the difficulties of locating Farrell’s work as postcolonial, or as what John McLeod terms “imperial-nostalgic” (“J.G. Farrell” 183). If postcolonial literature can be understood as that which “resist[s] colonial perspectives” (Boehmer 3), Farrell’s propensity to view the natives through his English protagonists’ binoculars suggests that his work falls short in this regard.

Inherent in Boehmer's definition, and in the above quoted interpretations of Farrell's work, is a concern about issues of native speech and silence. The right to speak is one that extends into the heart of colonial power structures, and that postcolonial struggles seek to reclaim. That such a right is of immense consequence for challenging the legacies of colonialism cannot be disputed, but what can and is disputed across a range of intersecting academic fields is the form this speech should assume. In many ways, Gayatri Spivak's enormously influential essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" has shaped the parameters of this debate, and Spivak's response to her own question opens up a number of new access points to a reading of Farrell's use of speech and silence in *Troubles*.

Initially it may seem that Farrell's Irish fall victim to the "symbolic laryngectomy" (Busia 90) performed by so many colonialist writers. Despite the irony that coats the tongue of his mock-omniscient narrator, it is a tongue that speaks the world from the English perspective. With the exception of Sarah – and it is a key exception that warrants closer scrutiny – Farrell stages a cast of mute, inarticulate and incomprehensible Irish characters, the first of which the Major meets on board a train to Kilnalough. In a scene that seems to defend the colonisers' exclusive right to represent self and other, the Major's direct speech is juxtaposed with that of his fellow passengers, which is embedded in the narrative: "[t]o tell you the truth I'm going to be married to a...an Irish girl' [the Major says]. Ah, sure, they smiled back at him. So that was it. Indeed now one might have known, they beamed" (15). The effect is to create a muted, undifferentiated Irish "they" in contrast to the articulate English subject. As the Major's panoramic view from the train window of the "wild flowers woven into the long gleaming grass" suggests, his ability to speak and his ability to

represent the nation and its people are intimately linked. Through the “delighted” Major’s eyes, Ireland is a nation of pastoral beauty and vocally unthreatening natives.

However, voicelessness will assume a very different air before the journey is at an end. As the Major rides through Kilnalough with Angela’s brother Ripon, Farrell sets up a disconcerting incongruity between Ripon’s fantasy of a “splendid” town of quaint shops and accommodating peasant girls, and the reality of dirt, poverty and quietly simmering hostility. Instead of the picturesque countryside he saw from the train window, the Major finds a “flat, empty field,” “wretched stone cottages,” “ragged” children, and the stench of decaying vegetation. As he absorbs this alien, hostile world, “silent men and women” watch them pass from the doorways of their homes (17). In a complete reversal of the scene on the train, Irish silence is deliberately associated with the Major’s unease, as well as with a bleak and desolate landscape. The extent of the Major’s disquiet is revealed that night as he dines with the Spencers, picturing the “wretched whitewashed cottages” and imagining “identical shadowy figures” eating their meals within them. The anxiety this image generates is evident in the Major’s reflection that it is all “too much for him” and his determination to leave Ireland the very next day (42).

The combination of the words “shadowy” and “identical” is reminiscent of Homi Bhabha’s analysis of colonialist discourse in his essay “The Other Question.” Bhabha writes that “colonial power produces the colonized as a fixed reality which is at once ‘other’ and yet entirely knowable and visible” (316); hence “one has to see the *surveillance* of colonial power as functioning in relation to the regime of the *scopic* drive” (322). Bhabha’s work sheds light on the Major’s angst-ridden reaction to the silent and invisible Irish – they are “identical” because they signify a homogenous, entirely “other” native population, yet “shadowy” because the Major cannot render

this otherness “entirely knowable and visible.” Seldom are the Irish fully embodied in *Troubles*, more often appearing as a frightening verbal and visual absence that slips beneath the radar of the coloniser’s “scopic drive.” The Major does not, of course, leave Ireland after that first night, and on one of his many walks in the countryside he succumbs to the desire to scrutinise the shadowy figures that lurk on the fringes of his consciousness. Approaching one of the “dilapidated” tenant farmhouses, he imagines he can see “a grim face” staring at him from a window, and as he retreats in alarm, a pack of “fiendishly” barking dogs are “dragging on chains somewhere out of sight behind walls, beyond hedges, inside closed doors” (80). The succession of words implying invisibility – behind, beyond, inside – invests this scene with its menacing overtones, and is suggestive of a traumatic encounter with a hidden and elusive native population.

As these examples reveal, in *Troubles* silence becomes less about colonial oppression than about anti-colonial menace. It is a strategy that enables Farrell to navigate the hazardous terrain of subaltern-speak and offer a way out of the critical impasse at which Spivak deserts the readers of her essay. This impasse takes the shape of a seemingly insurmountable paradox: on the one hand, in seeking to “make the subaltern speak” or uncover narratives where she has spoken, the “transparent” intellectual reinscribes her own privilege (87); yet Spivak simultaneously warns against “abstain[ing] from representation” entirely (91). If indeed “the subaltern cannot speak” (104), perhaps her silence holds the promise a less pessimistic response to Spivak’s famous question.

To suggest that Farrell provides a solution to the thorny issue of subaltern representation is simplistic to say the least. What he does do, however, is use Irish silence to resist “the work of imperialist subject-constitution” that occurs, according

to Spivak, in the act of retrieving subaltern voices (90). To read *Troubles* in the context of Spivak's essay is to see that Irish voices cannot be genuinely transgressive if they are projected from within the very power centres to which they aim to "speak back." So rather than attempt to speak on behalf of the subaltern and naturalise his own privilege, Farrell recasts the trope of native silence as menacing anti-colonial agency. As Judie Newman argues in regard to the Indian "cannon fodder" of *The Siege of Krishnapur*, "[s]ilence may be a source of resistance and challenge, a refusal to enter metropolitan discourse" (88). In the scenes in Kilnalough and outside the tenant farmhouse discussed above, Farrell frames his Irish peasants with images of poverty that silently speak the text of their dispossession and anti-colonial hostility, transforming imposed muteness into cunning reticence. It is a technique that sheds interpretive light not only on Farrell's use of silence, but on his association between native and nature – two strategies that intersect with each other for a powerfully transgressive effect.

Native and Nature

The association between native and nature has a long history in discourses of Irishness. According to Edward Hirsch, Revivalist Irish writers such as W.B. Yeats and Douglas Hyde responded to negative "paddy" stereotypes with a vision of an idealised Irish peasant, whose innate connection with the land and archaic way of life was set in opposition to the alienating modern city. In this way, the noble peasant came to represent authentic Irishness, the very essence of the nation itself (1118-20). Inherent in these writers' primitivism is a dichotomy between nature and culture, a dichotomy that, regardless of the primitivists' intentions, evokes pernicious connotations along with the ostensibly positive ones. As Leerssen asserts, culture

signifies a development beyond humankind's raw, natural state that legitimates the control of those who are savage and uncivilised (26).

In this sense, Farrell's association between nature and native in *Troubles* runs the risk of reinscribing these primitivist ideologies. It is an association that operates on multiple levels in the text, most obviously in the plant growth and the colony of cats that jointly threaten to destroy the Majestic, as well as in the cyclic, seasonal pattern of the Civil War. Directly following a contemplation of the "news from Ireland" at his aunt's house in London, the Major reflects: "Presently the cricket season came to an end. A rainy, discouraging autumn took its place. Soon it would be Christmas" (114). Like the seasons, the troubles "ebbed and flowed, now better, now worse" (138), and in the climax of the book this ebbing and flowing will take on far more deadly connotations. But in the meantime, the Major returns to the Majestic to find that "as the seasons revolve[d]" a relatively small family of cats in the Imperial Bar had multiplied into "a seething carpet of fur" (149). Similarly, the "extraordinarily powerful" plant growth he finds in the Palm Court prompts him to reflect that "here too the seasons had continued to revolve" (150). In contrast to the "exhausted" and "inert" inhabitants of the Majestic, the foliage is invested with a menacing vitality with verbs such as "seized," "throttled," "hammering" and "interweaving" (20-23).

It is this air of aggression that radicalises Farrell's use of the nature-culture split. The forces of nature in the text – the cats, plants and weather – are forces of change, menace and destruction. Early in his stay in Ireland, the Major is delighted by the litter of "charming little ginger fellows" that make their home in the Imperial Bar (108). His initial complacency about the bar's atmosphere of simmering violence reflects his early attitude to Irish hostility: like the "splendidly Irish" band that attacks

the police with brass instruments (74), the cats' "blazing" eyes and "tiny claws" pose no genuine threat. As the troubles escalate into widespread violence and chaos, the cats are transformed from familiar domestic pets into savage territorial brutes. The kittens grow at a "disturbing" rate (260) and, like the elusive Irish enemy, become a "threatening movement in the darkly swaying shadows" that lace the atmosphere at the Majestic with an "odour of fear and violence" (237). To consolidate this connection with the Irish terrorists, Farrell uses a repertoire of military metaphors to describe the "the great army" of cats that fights out "appalling...battles" (440) to "commandeer" new territory (202). The plant growth taking over the Majestic is similarly invested with sinister military and human traits. As it gradually "advances like a green epidemic" to take "command" of the entire building (285-87), the foliage begins to take on the appearance of a powerful and threatening male body, complete with a "thick and hairy" thigh (218), "white, hairy wrist" (274), and "muscular" forearm (389). In a scene that almost literalises the plant's symbolic function, Edward slashes away at some "new and astonishing growth of bamboo" with a bread-knife while simultaneously mounting a verbal attack on the "bloody Shinnners" and their "latest" paramilitary strategy (151).

The delightful comedy of these images belies much deeper implications that extend beyond mere symbolism. On one level, the destructive power of nature subverts the ideological assumptions inherent in the nature-culture divide. This is supported by the colonisers' tragic failure to live up to their side of the dichotomy – at the Majestic, the trappings of "culture" are grimy, decrepit and defunct. The most transgressive aspect of Farrell's association between nature and native, however, lies in what Edward Said identifies as the "cartographic urge" (79). According to Said, the literal and imaginative reterritorialisation of land represents the most fundamental

form of resistance to imperialism, which is, “after all, an act of geographical violence through which virtually every space in the world is explored, charted, and finally brought under control” (77). Following from Said, it is clear that the subjugation of the Irish is deeply inscribed onto the land itself, a land that is in turn laden with histories of “invasion, dispossession, plantation, famine, eviction, land wars, emigration, and rural depopulation” (Nash 244). It is the mere fact of the Irish people’s presence on the land – both literal and imaginative – that enacts the most fundamental challenge to colonial power, and by which the romantic association between nature and the Irish peasantry is skilfully politicised.

Edward’s first meeting with the Major, in which he is introduced to the Sinn Fein terrorists as a menacing, undifferentiated presence in the landscape, represents a site of intersection between the function of silence and nature in the text. Having established silence as a form of anti-colonial menace, Farrell positions the Sinn Feiners as elusive “quarry” in the landscape to doubly inscribe their transgressive power. Although the bemused Major hopes not to shoot anyone on his first day in Ireland “if he can possibly avoid it” (27), he finds himself embroiled in a ludicrous mission to sniff out some “unsavoury characters” supposedly lurking in the hotel grounds (26). This first image of Edward obsessively hunting “shifty individuals in the undergrowth” (26) is one that will resonate throughout the text, and it is his paranoia that illustrates the subversive power of native silence and invisibility. Whilst the others are ready to concede defeat, Edward’s senses remain on high alert: “[He] was looking around cautiously. There was a rustle in the undergrowth. He fired two deafening shots. A rabbit flew away, careering wildly through the trees” (31). The succession of short, sharp sentences in this passage builds a sense of suspense and fear, and hints at the desperation behind Edward’s imperialist bravado. Such is his

anxiety that near to his departure from Ireland, his tortured imagination produces a terrifying image of “silent [and]...ruthless armies of the Pope” gathering around the boundaries of his estate (432).

The gradual decline in Edward’s mental health is aided by an overwhelming desire to draw back the veil of silence and invisibility that covers the face of his enemy. This is painfully apparent in a scene at a local Irish pub, to where Edward takes a patriotic platoon of elderly ladies to “show the flag” and their loyalty to the King (85). The “farcical affair” (85) is related by Ripon, whose distaste for the pub, with its “haggard and blowsy” occupants, “rank, beery smell” and “frightfully gruesome Sacred Hearts” seems hollow and futile in the wake of the English army’s humiliating retreat. In this scene, silence as passivity is utterly subverted as it takes on a menacing energy of its own. Almost by way of response to Ripon’s colonialist stereotypes, the Irish patrons’ silence grips the room “like a heavy frost” and the unnerved invaders begin to wonder why “‘they’ [don’t] start talking again, in respectful undertones, of course” (87). When the silence is eventually broken, the English are drenched in “the yellow pus” of the patrons’ laughter and forced to retreat in utter humiliation. The only meek, defeated silence here is that of the English, who do not “[say] a word” as they scurry back behind Anglo-Irish lines (88).

Driven to the pub to confront his enemy face to face, Edward is again deterred by a barrier of absence and silence. He vents his frustration in a bitter attack on the Sinn Feiners’ “cowardly” and “devious” tactics, calling on the terrorists to “fight openly if they must, man to man” (384). In this very different war to the one recently fought against the Germans, Edward is forced to abandon the rules of conventional warfare and turn the grounds surrounding the Majestic into a natural battle zone, complete with foxholes in the potato fields and “first-aid boxes lodged in hollow

trees" (431). The landscape becomes a space of hostility and fear that betrays only traces of "the menace" (432), such as the death notice the terrorists leave in the hotel's outer grounds for "spies and traitors" (162). In the process of removing this threatening letter, the Major looks out into the "dense woods, matted with undergrowth and strung with brambles like trip-wires," and knows that somewhere in this hostile warlike landscape, the authors of the letter are lurking.

Nature comes to function as a medium of communication – or more accurately, of miscommunication – between the Irish and the occupants of the Majestic, whose ability to defend themselves is drastically hampered by their inability to interpret these cryptic messages. During one of his routine examinations of the countryside with a pair of field glasses rescued from the corpse of a Prussian soldier, the Major notices a large boulder that has inexplicably been carted to the edge of the cornfield, as well as the stump of a tree that "quite positively had not been there yesterday" (193-94). However strange these occurrences, far more so is the mysterious burning of the cornfields the following night. Unable to fathom why "they" should do such a thing, the Major's only solid evaluation of the situation is that the clumps of unburned corn remind him of "the worm-eaten scalps" of the destitute young boys he has seen skulking on the fringes of the Kilnalough golf course (200).

This disturbing image of Irish poverty reveals as much about the Major's disillusionment with the imperial enterprise as about his fear of the Irish terrorists. In this image, the incongruous emotions of fear and empathy pull against each other in a way that suggests that a physical threat to the Major's safety is also a threat to his ideological investment in the British Empire. Farrell achieves this compound effect in another similar image, repeated twice to emphasise its significance, which reveals the transgressive extent of the interplay of nature, silence and menace in the text.

Returning to the Majestic from his trip to London, the Major observes a “ragged” man standing in a field, “staring at the ground”; and again, later in the day, standing “motionless as a rock” framed by images of the “degenerated” and “empty” fields behind him (140). Farrell deepens the historical and political implications of these desolate scenes through reference to the potato fields “abandoned to the weeds” (140), an image that subtly evokes the Great Irish Famine of the 1840s. Resulting in mass starvation and emigration from which Ireland is still demographically recovering, the famine has been re-evaluated in the latter half of the twentieth-century less as a natural disaster than as an instance of horrific colonial brutality. As Christine Kinealy has shown, the British Government of the time implemented a policy of minimal intervention, justifying this with the perceived need to curtail Ireland’s rural population growth and accelerate the process of modernisation (19). Contemporary records show that grain, cattle and other foodstuffs sufficient to feed two million people continued to leave the country throughout the 1840s (25), figures that speak of the true tragedy of the famine – that one million people starved to death at the centre of what was the richest empire in the world. But despite the hopes of some 1840s British MPs, the Catholic Irish have not died out, and it is simply through the “ragged” man’s silent presence on the land that Farrell resurrects a painful national memory and gestures to its ongoing significance in the present struggle.

The images of this man not only gesture to centuries of Irish suffering, but also bring into play the notion of the colonisers’ limited perspective. Prior to his second encounter with the man, the Major pauses halfway up a flight of stone steps to survey the view “over the strip of park-land to the south-west, and beyond to the meadow”; on the next terrace he will be able to see “clear to the tenants’ farms and the rolling hills behind” (148). If the Major is a monarch-of-all-he-surveys (Pratt),

however, it is only momentarily. Having reached the highest terrace, he pauses again to consider the tenant farmhouses, and the narrator tells us, “[m]uch nearer, though (indeed, near enough to have been visible from the lower terrace if he had looked more carefully)...a man was standing...” (148). Here, Farrell constructs the boundaries of the Major’s vision by distinguishing his gaze from that of the narrator’s. It is a technique Farrell employs throughout the text, most notably in images of the Major scanning the countryside, “looking for the menace” (432). While he “knows it’s there somewhere” he also knows that “to him it [is] invisible,” an awareness that reinforces his sense of vulnerability.

The Major is again aware of his vulnerability as he watches a “rabble-rousing” rally with Bolton, a member of the British Auxiliary Division. To protect themselves from a “bullet in the spine” (270), the two men survey the rally from the safety of a hill slope some distance away. As they look “down the slope towards the sea” to the assembled people, Bolton’s comment that the Irish are “more like animals than humans” (269) draws attention to the relationship between looking and colonial brutality. However, from their position on the hill the men’s ability to see and hear is significantly restricted, and it is this “lack of perspective” (271) that complicates the power relationships at play in the watching-being watched dichotomy. Bolton’s words are undermined by the fact that he is too afraid to approach the rally and get a clearer picture of its attendees, whose heads, with the “foreshortening of perspective,” seem to be “piled on top of another” (270); similarly, the Major’s comment that one of the speakers looks “wild” seems hollow in light of the fact that he can barely see him. J.M. Rignall asserts that in *Troubles*, “the precarious, threatened position is that of the watchers in their imagined superiority, not the watched” (22). As Rignall suggests, the

act of surveillance in this text is one of fear and vulnerability rather than of colonial power.

The threat to the watchers again emerges at the intersection of nature and silence. The “wild” young man is framed with images of a powerful and furious sea that “crash[es] around him in a torrent of foam” as he shouts his “soundless words of rage” to the assembled listeners (271). Whilst the description of the man’s “thick muscled neck,” with veins “bulging furiously as [his] mouth opened and closed” continues Farrell’s project of relating silence with menace, the phrase “soundless words of rage” suggests a subtle shift in his approach. Unlike the silent men and women in Kilnalough and the terrorists hidden in the landscape, this Irish man is speaking and being heard by a “listening” crowd – it is only from the Major’s perspective that his words are “soundless” (270). Farrell foregrounds this in the scene’s last sentence, in which the narrator informs the reader that it is only the Major’s “lack of perspective that made it seem as if [the man] would be swept away” by the towering breakers behind him (271). This sentence, and the scene as a whole, exposes a gap between action and interpretation that illustrates the colonisers’ disabling lack of scopic and ideological perspective. Again, Spivak’s essay points the way to an interpretation of Farrell’s silent Irish that does not conflate the ability to speak and the ability to be heard. At once present and muted, native speech comes to resemble native silence as a result of the colonisers’ unwillingness or inability to listen – a technique that supports and extends Farrell’s post-imperial politics of representation.

Speech as Silence

From his first day at the Majestic the Major is preoccupied with locating his elusive fiancé, a frustrating task that is only hampered by Edward's cryptic clues as to his daughter's whereabouts. In desperation the Major turns to the hotel cook for help. But again his mission is thwarted, this time by the apparently insurmountable barrier of the Irish accent – of the “garrulous” cook's rapid torrent of words, the Major can understand but a few (52). The odd recognisable phrase, such as “gone to the angels” and “Jesus, Mary and Joseph” only confirm the sense that she is indeed speaking an alien language in which linguistic and religious otherness intersect. Determined to “cultivate” the woman, the Major plans a “roguish” performance of English masculinity he expects will be “irresistible to a fat Irish cook” (76). She responds with an embarrassment so acute that the Major feels more like a “sexual deviate” than a charming English lad, and from this point he resolves not even “to nod to her when they passed on the stairs” (77).

So utterly defamiliarised is his native tongue in the mouth of this Irish woman that he is increasingly convinced that she is either “speaking Irish,” or suffering from “a defective palate” abetted by the “absence of teeth” (367). This reaction points to the function of language as a marker of cultural and “racial” difference, a connection Clair Wills draws in her essay on the role of language in contemporary Irish politics. Wills demonstrates that discourses of the “wild Irish” have developed not only in response to different lifestyles and habits, but to a “horried revulsion [for] the degenerate Irish accent” (21). Wills' assertion that Irish people “are marked by their voices, their (mis)use of the English language” (21) sheds light on the Major's dismayed reaction to the cook's “gabbled” English (366), a term that is loaded with

assumptions about the inferiority of cultural and linguistic impurity. Whilst the cook's speech undoubtedly marks her as other, it is also a source of anxiety for the Major – following their first encounter, he is startled by a “strange and terrifying” vision of her disembodied head on a platter of chopped onions (54). In the mouth of the Irish woman, English becomes a hybridised and fragmented language to which neither she nor the Major can claim exclusive rights, serving as an uncomfortable reminder that colonisation is not a unidirectional flow of cultural power.

No matter how subversively hybridised, this Irish woman's voice nevertheless remains muted throughout the text. In the process of trying to organise the cook's “mysterious phrases” into a “coherent pattern” (366), the Major seems to enact Spivak's central point that the subaltern's voice is fundamentally untranslatable. But again we see the potential for an alternative approach to Farrell's work, a potential that emerges in the context of McLeod's description of Farrell as a “post-imperial” writer. McLeod argues for Farrell's work to be re-evaluated alongside other post-imperial writers such as Salman Rushdie and Timothy Mo, writers who, like Farrell, are influenced by a purchase upon another culture but who have been trained and educated by the elite western academy (“J.G. Farrell” 185). To re-evaluate *Troubles* in this way is to see that Farrell consciously “inhabits those very structures [he] seeks to disassemble” (“Exhibiting Empire” 117). Echoing McLeod, Spivak has argued in her book of interviews *The Postcolonial Critic* that the elite intellectual can indeed play a “positive role” in subaltern representation provided she “intervene[s] as well as inhabit[s]” the constraints of western liberalism (72). Following from McLeod and Spivak, it is possible to read Farrell's muted Irish as a positive intervention on the issue of subaltern representation that renders the privileges of western hegemony restrictive rather than enabling. On both the dialogic and structural levels of the text,

Farrell's Irish are silenced so systemically and systematically that the nature of this silence is skilfully subverted. The English prove entirely unable to traverse geographic, cultural and linguistic distance to interpret Irish speech, and the effect is not to mute Irish resistance, but to expose the colonisers' ineptitude.

It is this ideological deafness that the English prove time again throughout the text. Whilst the member of the golf club, for instance, enjoy a "splendid view over the links and beyond to the cornfields" (173-74), Farrell never loses sight of the limitations of this privileged perspective – from here, the voices of destitute men and boys hoping to be selected as caddies are discernable only as a "piercing, pitiful clamour" (174). These somewhat sinister figures retire to "the shadows where they have been lurking" and will later return to linger in the Major's thoughts. The inability to interpret Irish speech manifests most threateningly in the figure of the diabolic butler Murphy, who skulks in the deserted caverns of the Majestic as a dark and silent presence. Even in the text's mock-apocalyptic climax in which Murphy appears at the window of the burning hotel as "Satan himself" (443), questions over his degree of sanity and his political loyalties remain unanswered, and the consequences of English incomprehension are made spectacularly apparent.

Farrell's portrayal of Doctor Ryan colours these consequences with a more political and historical hue. The elderly doctor is one of Farrell's most fervent critics of empire, but like the other inhabitants of the Majestic, the Major dismisses the doctor's fits of anti-British rhetoric as the ramblings of a "senile old codger" (119). On one of the doctor's visits to the hotel, the Major sits in the Palm Lounge wading through the mind-numbing tedium of Angela's final letter and trying to block out the sound of the doctor's "rambling and incoherent monologue" on the "new spirit in Ireland" (155). In this monologue Farrell again brings the Great Irish Famine into

play. To a mocking and unreceptive audience, the doctor relates his father's memory of "the hunger":

'Sure we'll have to go to another country, says he, to America...in those days they were leaving so quick they were starving there on the quays of New York. There's no luck in Ireland...'

'There's no luck in Ireland,' agreed Edward, winking at the Major, who was thinking: 'Such detail is intolerable'. (157)

In a similar way to the image of the silent man in the empty potato field, the doctor's story reconfigures the famine as more than a distant memory. In this scene Farrell mounts a devastating critique of the way histories of Irish suffering continue to be silenced and ignored, and in doing so sheds light on the relationship between past injustice and the present conflict. By parenthesising the doctor's story, Farrell weaves Irish repression into the text's grammatical structures and the doctor's voice becomes a muted but ever-present force surging beneath the relentlessly lapping waves of Angela's handwriting. Juxtaposed with the inane triviality of dogs and dressing tables, the story is more powerful for the fact that only the reader is listening.

The tragedy of this moment lies in a fundamental miscommunication, which can be extended to consider the relationship between Catholics and Protestants in the text in general. The scene between Edward and Mr Noonan represents a humorous microcosm of the mistrustful silence that hinders co-operation between these two factions of Irish society. Following the news of his son's engagement to Maire Noonan, Edward attempts to overcome his religious prejudice and arrange a meeting with her father, and in the scene of miscommunication and mistaken identity that ensues, the two men wander the hotel in search of each other until Mr Noonan is ejected by the unruly Spencer twins.

The farce begins when each mistakes the other for something he is not: Mr Noonan, who “likes to wear clothes that give him a soldierly air,” is assumed to be an “elderly and irascible telegraph boy”; Edward a “particularly insolent gardener” (122). In a way that echoes the Civil War’s cyclic patterns of violence, reprisal and negotiation, the two men move back and forth through the “mouldering caverns” of the Majestic, towards and away from each other, contemplating the “unbridgeable chasm” between Catholic and Protestant (122). This chasm proves largely imaginary however, as with delightful irony Farrell portrays each man as the “mirror-image” of the other – Edward’s revulsion for the “stupefying and bizarre dogmatic precepts” of Roman Catholicism is neatly echoed in Mr Noonan’s loathing for the “spiteful” and “hypocritical” English (126). Neither, Farrell tells the reader, are “the least enthusiastic about a union of their respective children” (122), and the full weight of his meaning is apparent on the next page in Mr Noonan’s observation that “the Unionist cause had fallen into decline” (123). Religion performs a pseudo-racial function here, with each man deeply resentful that his ancestry will be contaminated with “bog Catholicism” or “sinful” Protestantism (126) respectively. For a moment Farrell’s own voice intrudes on this deeply satirical scene in the scathing observation that anti-Catholic prejudice “run[s] in the blood of the Protestant Irish” (124). As these words and the entire scene suggests, the “unbridgeable chasm” between the two factions has less to do with pseudo-racialism than with deeply entrenched ignorance and hypocrisy.

It is this breakdown of communication that pervades the text on multiple levels, and that the Major himself struggles to overcome. Although his view of the Irish is radically altered in the process of what Lars Hartveit terms “moral re-patterning” (160), it is a view that remains fogged with confusion and ambiguity,

manifesting most obviously in his relationship with Sarah. His desperate attempts at intimacy proceed in a seemingly arbitrary pattern of success and failure, culminating in Sarah's ultimate rejection of him in favour of the brutal Bolton. If it is Angela who brings the Major to Ireland, it is certainly Sarah who keeps him there, enduring the violence and chaos of civil war in order to be near her. But like everything about Ireland, Sarah proves impossible to pin down, and his hazy vision of her will eventually disappear entirely.

In many ways, Farrell's characterisation of Sarah presents an interpretive challenge to the relationship between silence and menace – this Irish woman's defiant verbosity not only disrupts such a reading, it threatens to make it utterly redundant. Seemingly liberated from the verbal disabilities of her fellow Irish, Sarah is portrayed as a highly articulate young woman with a cuttingly sarcastic tongue. Her first words to the Major as he comes across her stealing an apple from the orchard are a command – “Don't go away” – and she proceeds to humiliate him by referring to his shell-shock in a matter of moments (32-34). Just as the Major is inclined to agree with Ripon that Sarah is “poisonous,” she instructs him to push her wheelchair, and with this he decides that she is not “quite as nasty as he had supposed” (35). The sincerity of her apparent illness will become increasingly uncertain, but in the meantime it proves a handy manipulative tool.

The extent to which Sarah's voice penetrates the text is evident in the title of Part One – “A Member of the Quality” – a label Sarah scornfully attributes to the Major in their first meeting. In this and other scenes in which Sarah is present, her loquaciousness and verbal eloquence dominate the other characters. For instance, during a visit to her home where she is suffering from some unspecified manifestation of her mysterious illness, the Major's voice is overwhelmed by her lengthy chunks of

direct and indirect speech. As her voluble and somewhat “hysterical” chatter skips between diverse topics of conversation, the stupefying inertia of the Majestic seems far away. Her speech is scattered with colourful and eloquent phrases such as “a hand like a gelatine lobster” (117) and “[having] a brat a year like a pullet laying eggs” (116), phrases that establish Sarah as the most articulate character in the book. The Major’s own voice seems stale and repressed in comparison, and as their friendship develops, Sarah injects colour into his bleak and apathetic world. During her visit to his aunt’s house in London, she revives the Major’s “frozen” mind with the “warmth of her sympathy” (136-37), and so strong are her powers of speech that, if only momentarily, the “bubble of bitterness in his mind slowly dissolve[s]” and he is able to cry for his friends lost in the war. Following this, however, she abruptly withdraws her friendship and his world becomes “as grey as it had always been” (138).

As the bewildered Major quickly discovers, Sarah can be as cruel as she is delightful. Even in her most vibrant of moods, her lengthy speeches are punctuated with accusations and insults that are primarily targeted at the Major’s “Englishness” (59). Inherent in these insults is an alternative vocabulary of empire, which renames the English as “the enemy” (83), the Kilnalough magistrate as a “representative of the foreign oppressor” (133), and the Major simply as “Brendan” so not to “recognise the British army” as an occupying force (82). She mounts an attack on official colonialist discourses at the most primary level of word choice – for instance, the Easter Rebellion is reconceptualised not as a “treacherous attack by Irish hooligans,” but a heroic uprising staged by romantic “patriots” and “gentlemen” (83).

By allowing her voice to seep into the text’s structural core, Farrell presents an alternative ideological perspective and “[calls] into question the authority of any one utterance” (Ferns, “Regions of the Empire” 218). Through Sarah’s eyes, to be Irish

becomes “normal,” in opposition to the “ridiculous,” “arrogant” and “condescending” English. For instance, wandering through Kilnalough the Major silently turns a superior gaze on “idling” men and “barefoot” children, and almost by way of response Sarah teases him for his “ramrod posture” and English “respectability” (59). In this way, Sarah reverses colonialist discursive systems by directing negative stereotypes back at the Major, who as a result is perpetually on the defensive. In order to avoid being labelled as either unimaginative or as “literal as a lump of dough,” he responds to her fanciful stories by saying that he “believe[s] parts of them (and enjoy[s] other parts).” His efforts are in vain however, as she accuses him of having made a “cautious and typically British compromise” (134). Such stereotypes become weapons for Sarah to beat the colonisers at their own rhetorical game.

Although Sarah’s speech clearly represents a dissenting force in the text, some critics have nevertheless taken issue with Farrell’s portrayal of her and of his other female characters. For instance, Ronald Tamplin observes that the women in *Troubles* seem to be restricted to “symbolic status”: “Angela (Anglo-Ireland), becoming defunct; and Sarah (Ireland), enigmatic, contradictory but delightful” (57). Sarah is undoubtedly enigmatic – questions over her illness and her relationships with Edward and Bolton are left conspicuously unanswered. Furthermore, the mysterious matter of her disability seems to support the notion of Sarah as a symbol of Irish resistance, growing in strength as the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy withers away. But if, as Tamplin asserts, Sarah is “more vision than fact” (56), this is not because Farrell denies her human depth and motivations but because the Major is unable to read these. Tamplin is correct to warn against overreaching with the symbols, and to pose the question: “If Sarah is a symbol of Ireland, how do we fit in her liaison with Bolton?” (58). For Chris Ferns, the answer is a matter of psychology, of the Irish “wanting a Britain they

can hate” (“Building a Country” 163). But Ferns’ assessment falls into the trap of trying to force a rigid interpretive framework over Farrell’s complex and inconstant characterisation. Indirectly answering his own question, Tamplin argues that Farrell presents a “controlled silence” at the centre of his characters that inhibits any “consistent vision of them” (58). While Tamplin’s argument is over-stretched in the sense that Farrell does offer a consistent vision of many of his English characters, particularly the Major, it is nevertheless essential for understanding Farrell’s representation of Sarah.

The “controlled silence” Farrell employs manifests in Sarah’s volatile behaviour, which for the Major is utterly indecipherable. As a point of contrast, Farrell lays bare the Major’s emotional and psychological life with lucid and evocative prose. The reader is afforded graphic insight into the horrors of what is now known as post-traumatic stress disorder in the “pallid and speechless” figures crawling around his shell-shocked brain (93), and into the anguish of unrequited love: “It was as if he had been skinned alive...the slightest banal word would produce a scream of agony” (277). No such reference points are provided for interpreting Sarah’s actions, and the Major will never know what lies behind the “bitter, sly expression” he so often sees upon her face (340). One moment she is “affectionate and ingenuous” (136), the next “quite capable of falling into a cold rage for no reason that he could perceive” (248). Here, Farrell again brings into play the idea of limited perception and perspective – it is precisely because Sarah speaks so fluently that the Major’s inability to interpret her is so revealing. At the point of this breakdown of communication, Sarah’s speech comes to resemble that of her fellow Irish characters.

For Farrell to attempt to speak as an Irish woman, he must enter the highly unstable terrain of female subaltern representation. Reading the text against the

theoretical backdrop of “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, it is evident that Sarah is “doubly in shadow,” subject to the ideological constraints of both her gender and of colonialism (82). So for Spivak the woman’s speech is doubly inscribed with the problematics of subaltern representation, rendering the notion of the “nonrepresenting intellectual” making space for her to speak “an absurdity” (84). It is a dilemma Farrell negotiates by setting up a conspicuous incongruity between how well Sarah speaks and how poorly the Major’s comprehends, thus simultaneously “speak[ing] the text of female exploitation” (84) and exposing the inadequacy of the dominant male’s interpretation of that text. Such a reading is useful for responding to Tamplin’s question about Sarah’s relationship with Bolton. The answer is evidently the antithesis of Ferns’ interpretation – Farrell’s intention is to deliberately block such a totalising psychological reading. Whilst Sarah’s choice to be in a relationship with someone that regularly “knocks her cold” (388) brings sexual and colonial brutality to the fore, Farrell resists reinscribing Sarah’s subjugation to these hegemonic systems by refusing access to an omniscient view inside her head. The Major is left to obsess over “what sort of girl” would tolerate such violence (393), and in this way the text of female exploitation can be present but untranslated.

Farrell isolates specific phrases that literalise the notion of untranslatable subaltern speech. Comments such as “I should like to marry someone like you, Brendan, only with brains” prove enormously “difficult to interpret” (253) and intensify the Major’s sense of inadequacy. That Sarah forces him into a submissive sexual role is evident in the passive composition of sentence such as “he would allow himself to be mollified with indecent haste” (248). The Major learns early on that Sarah will not validate his heroic imperialist rhetoric: a gallant attempt to “save” her from “the Irish swine” asking for her hand in marriage is coldly rejected, and the

Major is forced to beg for her forgiveness (120). In this relationship, it is the English male who plays the role of the “child” (340), the “innocent” (63) and the “slave” (251), terms that are redolent with patriarchal and colonialist ideology. It is at the intersection of these discourses that the most transgressive element of Sarah’s untranslatable speech is located.

This is demonstrated in a scene in which the Major “finds himself being kissed” by her. The sense of his sexual passivity is intensified by the fact that after the kiss he is “unable to speak,” whilst Sarah casually and cruelly comments that his “moustache has a taste of garlic” (247). The reversal of traditional sexual roles is framed with a vivid and surprising description of the Major’s elated thoughts running around his head “like scared antelope” (247). This image hints at issues of nature and sexuality that are rendered more explicit in another striking phrase that follows: uncomfortable with the experience of sexual vulnerability and silence, the Major reflects that he is “a traveller through unmapped country” (247). This cartographic metaphor brings into play the connection between sexual and geographic knowledge, a connection that some postcolonial and feminist critics claim as a central justifying tenet of the imperial enterprise. According to Alison Blunt and Gillian Rose, imperial maps are violent inscriptive tools that not only describe colonised territories, but also “discipline them through discursive grids of Western power/knowledge” (10). In a similar way, they argue, women’s bodies have traditionally been mapped with medical and sexual discourses that establish and maintain systems of hegemonic patriarchy (15). As McClintock has graphically demonstrated, the fusion of these discourses manifests in European imperialist fantasies in which the unknown world is feminised and spatially spread for “sexual and military insemination” (*Imperial Leather* 30). The relationship between colonial and sexual possession is evident in the

military and cartographic metaphors the Major uses to codify Sarah's capricious behaviour – whilst his instincts warn against “unconditional surrender,” he nevertheless finds himself “wandering at large through the minefields of love” with “neither chart nor compass” (249). His dismayed reaction to Sarah's behaviour suggests the fear of what McClintock terms “boundary loss” (24): as a “traveller” through alien sexual terrain, the Major's desire to “map” Sarah's body is the desire to neutralise the threat of racial and sexual difference. His inability to do so generates an anxiety that reveals the trauma as well as the brutality inherent in the trope of the feminised landscape.

If the justification of imperialism rests on the feminisation of land, here this trope and its implications are reversed. This new world of female sexual agency is “unmapped” because the grids of hegemonic power have been displaced by the Major's inability to translate Sarah's speech and master her with sexual knowledge. Whilst the Major's tortured fantasy of Sarah's “brutally parted thighs” following her rejection of him (395) suggests that Bolton is able to master her in this way, it is unquestionably the Major with which the reader empathises and through which Farrell most potently enacts the sexual disempowerment of the English male. Catherine Nash argues in her essay on colonial mapping in Ireland that both colonialist and nationalist discourses appropriate the woman's body as national allegory, hence reinforcing the woman's “erosion from Irish history” and her “contemporary silencing” (229). Again, Farrell radicalises traditional associations between native and nature, foregrounding the relationship between sexual and imperial knowledge in order to block the process by which Sarah is allegorised as the body of the nation. The outcome is that she is rendered an anti-allegory that challenges rather than justifies the possession of native woman and native land.

In this way, the Major's inability to interpret Sarah's speech destabilises the systems that ideologically map the Irish landscape and people. This signifies a gradual breakdown of imperial order, a process that is symbolised in the text by the recurring motif of the English adrift on a turbulent sea. Directly following Sarah's baffling decision to terminate the communicative intimacy she and the Major shared during her stay in London, he reflects that he could "make no sense" of "the troubles": "It was like putting out to sea in a small boat: with the running of the waves it is impossible to tell how far one has moved over the water" (138). The ocean proves a pivotal image in *Troubles*, one that fuses Farrell's use of silence and nature into a literal and metaphorical menacing force.

Conclusion: The Advancing Green Tide

The Major wakes on his first morning at the Majestic exhausted from the "terrible shock" (43) of the hotel's squalid conditions. Having vomited the contents of his stomach upon the discovery of a rotting sheep's head in his room the previous evening, he impatiently endures Edward's elaborate pre-breakfast morning prayers and war commemoration ceremony. As the assembled guests eye the plates of bacon and eggs cooling on the breakfast table, Edward credits God for a list of inane and arbitrary gifts for which his devoted children should be grateful. Traces of existential anxiety linger in the "long and distressing" pauses that punctuate Edward's declaration of thanks for things like dogs, chairs and cricket matches. This is intensified by his desperate and fretful piety, which manifests in a disconcerting tendency to repeat stock devotional phrases with such fervour as to render them hollow and pathological:

For there *is* an order in the universe...there *is* an order...Without this purpose our life here below would be nothing more than a random collection of desperate acts...I repeat, a random collection of desperate acts. (44)

By implication, this obsession with “order” extends to the political situation in Ireland. The Protestants position themselves at the peak of “God’s pyramid,” where they can carry out the “duties that accompany [their] privileges” as the colonising elite. In this scene, a combination of the Major’s disinterest and Edward’s anxious repetition emphasises the fragility of a divinely sanctioned imperial order, and as the novel progresses, the ideological scaffolding of “God’s pyramid” will become increasingly unsound.

Such colonialist discourses are structured by a binary opposition between ordered civilisation and anarchic nature. The breakdown of imperial order suggests a descent into the meaninglessness and powerlessness hinted at in Edward’s anxious religious zeal, a descent that is symbolised in the extended metaphor of the Major adrift at sea in a leaking boat. For instance, as the elderly Mr Norton lies dying in bed, the Major keeps him from alarming the ladies with sordid stories of his sexual escapades by presenting him with mathematical problems from one of the twin’s text books. To one such problem involving whether a man in a leaking boat can make it to land before the boat sinks, he responds with “unexpected clarity”: “Afraid not quite, old chap” (422). This image interweaves with the Major’s desperate attempts to organise the chaos into which the Majestic has descended, and as the political situation in Ireland worsens, the boat that is imperial order “continue[s] to settle lower and lower in the water” (426). Having relocated the hysterical elderly occupants of the hotel and finally convinced Edward to join the twins in London, the Major finds a little more time to “rest on his oars” (422) alone at the hotel. A sense of foreboding

gathers in the silent, empty building in anticipation of the final and most threatening manifestation of this oceanic imagery.

Soon after Edward's departure, a young RIC officer arrives at the hotel with instructions to check the grounds for signs of "trouble" (433). When the officer does not reappear, the Major ventures out to find him and in the process is attacked from behind by unspecified "people" (436). Still Farrell does not allow the Major to come face to face with the elusive Irish enemy, who are written as a disembodied force rather than a fully realised presence. The faceless, undifferentiated "they" behind oddly passive sentences such as "the lowest terrace was reached," the "body was conveyed" and "a hole was begun" (435) signify Farrell's intention to continue to shroud the Irish in silence and invisibility. As they lower him into a hole on the beach with only his head exposed and "ready for the incoming tide," they also instigate a terrifying literalisation of the ocean metaphor.

Having armed his Irish with menacing reticence and control of the landscape throughout the text, Farrell transposes this discursive weaponry from the abstract to the real and very violent realm. Soon the semi-conscious Major becomes dimly aware of another head sticking out of the sand beside him, that of the missing RIC officer, and in a moment that demonstrates the extent of Farrell's penchant for the macabre, the Major asks his fellow disembodied head why it did not come for tea as requested. There is of course no response from the head, which "continue[s] to stare round at the Major with one cloudy blue eye opened very wide and the other one closed to a slit" (437). This gruesomely comical scene subtly evokes one of the Major's much earlier reflections on the plant growth taking over the tables and chairs in the Palm Court. As "the flooding tide continue[s] its advance" towards the prostrate and delirious Major,

the full implications of his earlier words are chillingly realised: “now all but a few of them had been engulfed by the advancing green tide” (152).

It is a phrase that underpins the complexities of Farrell’s post-imperial politics of representation. The helpless English colonisers are paralysed before a silent Irish terror that advances through the landscape like a green tide of brutal resistance. In this novel, “green” symbolises not just the Catholic Irish, but also their menacing association with the land from which they seek to expel the English invaders. This connection with a frightening and anarchic nature is consolidated in the reference to the “tide” of violence and political power. Perhaps most significantly, the warlike connotation of the verb “advance” indirectly grants Sinn Féin with what it has been most vehemently denied – recognition as a genuine military and political force. Combined as a phrase, these three words generate a sense of vigour and movement that can only signify the inevitable decline of English rule in Ireland.

However, this sense of inevitability is edged with the realities of ongoing political turmoil in Northern Ireland. The early twenty-first century reader of *Troubles* is subject to a triple-layered irony inherent in the title of the book itself, which refers not only to the 1919-21 Civil War, but to the resurgence of violence in the North around the time the book was published, and to current political unrest in the region. It is the continued British presence in the North that prompts McClintock to reflect that for Ireland, “there may be nothing ‘post’ about postcolonial at all” (“The Angel of Progress” 294), an assertion that sheds only partial light on the shortfalls of postcolonial theory in the Irish context. Perhaps the most urgent concern of those who turn their critical gaze on this nation should be to re-evaluate the static divisions between white and non-white, European and non-European, which structure the postcolonial paradigm. That there is little room to accommodate Ireland in this

paradigm suggests that it does not adequately distance itself from the colonial constructions it claims to critique. Ironically, a reading of Farrell's use of nature and silence extends the boundaries of a theoretical framework from which he himself, as a post-imperial writer, is necessarily excluded. It is from his position within the centre of western hegemony that Farrell projects his vision of the British Empire in decline, a vision that looks, from this perspective, like the advancing tide of postcolonial resistance.

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